

AONB Management Plan progress

The Plan sets out actions for the area by many partners under three priorities. Some highlights of progress in 2019-20 are shown here:



Land Management Supporting Landscape and Natural Beauty

- Defra tests/trials for **Environmental Land Management (ELM)** scheme
- **'Our Common Cause'** project - visions for 3 commons and development phase completed
- **Stepping Stones** project - work with farmer group and support for community groups
- **Clun Catchment** - habitat and water projects
- New **Peatlands** initiative scoping
- **Water Environment Grant (WEG)** projects providing advice to farmers
- Increase in **tree establishment** - landowners, local groups, MOREWoods scheme, events
- **Road verge** biodiversity projects
- **Wildlife survey** and monitoring by a variety of groups

Priority next steps:

Complete AONB **Nature Recovery Plan**

Collaborative work on **ELM development**

Disseminate guidance on **tree establishment**

Expand work on **Natural Flood Management**

Showcase activity on **regenerative farming**

Progress **social forestry** activity

Planning for a Sustainable Economy and Communities

- **Environment & Climate Emergency** - AONB Partnership recommendations to Councils, and two community events attended by 100+ people.
- Better engagement of **local authorities** following Management Plan approval
- Specialist **landscape support** contracted for AONB Partnership input to Ironbridge power station site redevelopment proposals
- **Landscape Guidance** document in draft
- Better AONB Partnership **liaison with Planning Committee members and officers** - through briefing session and casework
- **Church Stretton Community Led Plan** in progress
- Monitoring and mapping in progress of **planning applications** in the AONB

Priority next steps:

Identify and support activities leading to **net zero**

Pursue AONB-specific **planning policy**

Consult on and publish **Landscape Guidance**

Seek greater planning controls over **motorsports**

More capacity within AONB team for **planning work**

Evidence to demonstrate **value of the landscape to the economy**

People Enjoying and Caring About the Landscape

- **Young Rangers** project bid successful
- **Destination Partnership** and AONB team input into new Marches Visitor Economy Strategy
- **Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism** adding weight to AONB sustainable tourism activity
- **Shropshire Hills Shuttles** bus service ongoing
- Better promotion of local **walking** opportunities
- **'Fix the Fort'** appeal raising funds for Caer Caradoc
- New members and raised income from **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB**
- Successful new **Sustainable Tourism Expo** event
- Support to **Duke of Edinburgh Award** and **John Muir Award** providers
- Scoping **diversity and health** work with partners

Priority next steps:

Public information to encourage **dispersal of visitors**

Greater **connection of businesses to the AONB** landscape and its value

Support to businesses on **sustainability**

Enhanced investment in **walking and cycling infrastructure**

Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24 Actions - Progress Update October 2020

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	Progress at October 2020
-----	--------	------	-----------------	--------------------------

LM - Land Management Supporting Landscape and Natural Beauty

LM1	Work with Defra, NAAONB and local partners to ensure new Environmental Land Management Schemes deliver Management Plan priorities in the AONB	New action	AP, NE, NT, SWT, NFU, CLA	A number of Defra ELM tests/trials are going on in the AONB, including led by the National Trust (Stepping Stones area, on whole farm plans), by NFU, Soil Association and by private landowners. There is a need to share learning and define among partners the local environmental priorities for the AONB from the scheme. The AONB team have some funding from Defra and NAAONB for ELM advocacy work with farmers.
LM2	Develop further web-based guidance material for land managers – about landscape features and about utilising environmental assets sustainably	Aspiration	AP	Some material has been made available in follow-up to a community Environment & Climate Emergency event in Feb 2020. There is a need to disseminate local guidance especially on tree establishment to ensure best integration and benefits to the AONB landscape. A web page on the AONB website is in preparation.
LM3	Implement ' Our Common Cause ' upland commons project with local and national partners (subject to delivery phase approval)	In progress	AP, FCL, NT, NE	The Stage 2 NLHF funding application was successful, and the Delivery phase will begin in autumn 2020, staff recruitment is currently under way. The AONB team convenes the project Area Group.
LM4	Develop the Stepping Stones project into a long-term delivery initiative for the Long Mynd – Stiperstones area.	In progress	NT, AP, NE, SWT	Stepping Stones has been supported at the highest level in the National Trust as a long term partnership initiative. Current activity includes the Defra Test & Trial on Whole Farm Plans working with the Upper Onny Farmers group, a year of support for community activity funded by People's Postcode Lottery, and a study of farm based tourism in the area. A bid to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund has been made.
LM5	Continue to improve habitat and water quality in the River Clun for Freshwater pearl mussel	Ongoing	AP, EA, NE, SRT	Study commissioned by EA for Judicial Review concluded that major land use changes were needed in the catchment to achieve good status. Co-ordinated action by agencies continues. AONB team delivering two years of contracted delivery for Environment Agency 'Unmuddying the Waters' project, with biodiversity focus.
LM6	Co-ordinate catchment management through the Teme Partnership and Clun Catchment Partnership	Ongoing	SRT, AP & partners	The Teme Partnership and Clun Catchment Partnership both continue to operate and meet, providing a valuable collaboration and co-ordination mechanism.

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	Progress at October 2020
LM7	Work with landowners through the Water Environment Grant .	New action	AP, SRT	Teme - Onny - Clun WEG project is now in year 2 with 3 farm advisers undertaking farm water management plans. Project was temporarily suspended during Covid-19 restrictions in summer 2020. Another WEG project is active in the Rea catchment in the north of the AONB.
LM8	Establish a large programme of establishing new trees outside woodlands , partly to help offset losses from Ash dieback disease	New action	AP, WT & partners	NLHF have agreed an expression of interest for a full application for a Linking Landscapes (Trees Outside Woods) project. This is currently being developed by the AONB team with partners. Relevant NLHF programmes are currently not open for application. Shropshire Council have secured some Defra funding for Trees Outside Woods, to focus on agro-forestry and orchards.
LM9	Support well planned woodland creation to enhance landscape, biodiversity and resource protection	Ongoing	FC, WT	Forestry Commission continue to provide grants for large scale schemes. AONB team acts as a local agent for Woodland Trust MOREWoods scheme. Surge of interest in community tree planting schemes and need to identify suitable land and provision of advice and support. Multi-partner Marches woodland creation event held January 2020 to share best practice.
LM10	Develop an Upper Teme project – including expanding tree and woodland cover and enhancing the river SSSI	Aspiration	AP, NE, SRT, EA, NRW	This is an element within the planned Linking Landscapes project.
LM11	Develop a ' Monumental Volunteers ' project for management of historic sites	New action	AP, HE	A good deal of work has been done on this, but there is a need to align priorities of different partners and funders, and then to complete a project funding application. Other projects are currently taking a higher priority.
LM12	Work with landowners on restorative management of Plantations on Ancient Woodland sites (PAWS)	New action	AP, WT, FC	Potential new project still of interest, not progressed so far.
LM13	Develop a social forestry project with funded officer capacity, and a hub linking service providers and users	Aspiration	AP and partners	This remains an aspiration. A variety of community-led activity continues around the AONB.
LM14	Support management of trees and woodlands along with natural flood management in the Wenlock Edge area , and look at potential for an integrated area project	New action	NT, SWT, AP, NE, FC	Active 'Slow the Flow' projects around the Corve Dale and elsewhere. Wenlock Edge is one proposed target area in the developing 'Linking Landscapes' project.
LM15	Support actions to manage hay meadows, and species-rich grassland	Ongoing	AP, SWT, NE	The Marches Meadows Group provides support to individuals. A number of conservation organisations are active in meadow and grassland management e.g. Natural England at the Stiperstones, National Trust new meadows at Jinlye.

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	Progress at October 2020
LM16	Expand and support community projects managing road verges for biodiversity	Ongoing	AP, SWT, SC	Local projects on road verges are increasing - Edgton featured in national Plantlife publication, Little Stretton and All Stretton projects also supported by AONB Conservation Fund. NLHF funded partnership project (RSVP) led by Caring for God's Acre charity.
LM17	Support continued understanding of the geology of the AONB and the conservation and management of geological and geomorphological sites	Ongoing	SGS, NE, AP	Individual organisations continue activity but little specific project work at present.
LM18	Promote training for land management and conservation, and seek to address gaps in provision where identified	Ongoing	AP, NE, NT, HE	A mixture of opportunities are available. A structured review of needs and provision would be valuable.
LM19	Work with landowners regarding management of county Wildlife Sites	Ongoing	SWT	This is now being taken forward mostly through work on Nature Recovery Networks. Given the importance of these sites, there is probably insufficient capacity for advice to landowners on their management.
LM20	Seek opportunities to improve co-ordination of farm and conservation advice , and address gaps if possible	Ongoing	NE, AP, SWT	NFU's ELM test/trial is focussed on this. Stepping Stones test/trial has also looked at the role of advisers in relation to Whole Farm Plans.
LM21	Continue network of Shropshire Hills Uplands Forum linking with national Uplands Alliance	Ongoing	AP and partners	The Uplands Forum has not been repeated, but links are maintained with the national Uplands Alliance.
LM22	Collate environmental data relevant to the AONB	Ongoing	AP, NE, SC	Some action but this task requires better resourcing to optimise effectiveness.
LM23	Complete a Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB and take action towards Colchester Declaration targets for nature recovery.	New action	AP, EA, NE, SWT	Initial research, scoping and mapping carried out.
LM24	Scope and develop a new project on Shropshire Hills AONB peatlands (an under-recognised resource of mainly shallow and pocketed peat)	New action	AP, EA, NE, NT, SWT	Initial scoping carried out early 2020 and phase 1 funding bid submitted.

PL - Planning for a Sustainable Economy and Communities

PL1	Press for stronger status for AONB structures as a statutory consultee in planning and the necessary resources to fulfil duties which go with this	Aspiration	AP, NAAP, NE, LAs	Case made through AONB Partnership input to Glover Review. Continue to encourage where opportunities arise.
PL2	Expand capacity within the AONB team for work on planning consultations	New action	AP	Not achieved so far, and very challenging within existing resources. Specialist landscape support has been hired in for a key case - Ironbridge power station site redevelopment.
PL3	Develop Design Guidance and a checklist for domestic development	New action	AP, LAs	Some work done on a checklist. Intention to develop a project brief and scope when Nature Recovery Plan is completed.

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	Progress at October 2020
PL4	Develop a Landscape Guidance document	New action	AP, LAs, NE	This is now going to be rolled in to the Nature Recovery Plan.
PL5	Continue to foster links and understanding between Partnership and planning officers and committee members	Ongoing	AP, LAs	AONB briefing session delivered to Shropshire Council Planning Committee members March 2020. Increased direct communication with planning officers.
PL6	Support activities contributing to a net zero Shropshire Hills for greenhouse gas emissions, compatible with the AONB's special qualities	Ongoing	AP, LAs	AONB Partnership session on Environment & Climate Emergency held Oct 2019 with recommendations made to the two Councils. Community event held Feb 2020 with 100 people attending. AONB Manager participating in Shropshire Council Climate Change officer group. Involvement at a variety of levels in Shropshire Climate Action Partnership and South Shropshire CLimate Action Group.
PL7	Monitor and report on planning applications in the AONB	Aspiration	LAs	Some analysis of application categories, outcomes and mapping has been undertaken.
PL8	Continue to foster stronger links with other relevant planning consultees – including Natural England, CPRE and other Council departments	Ongoing	AP	This has happened in some cases, but relatively little input to planning casework has been made recently for capacity reasons.
PL9	Support new Community Led Plans to take the AONB fully into account	Ongoing	AP	Some support provided and ongoing to Church Stretton CLP process.
PL10	Make the case for an Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights for motorsports in the AONB	New action	AP	Active discussion on this in 2019, which needs further follow up.
PL11	Develop guidance on management and design of roads in the AONB	Aspiration	AP, LAs	No action.
PL12	Undertake work to identify key viewpoints within the AONB, and looking into it from surrounding areas	Aspiration	AP and partners	No action.
PL13	Demonstrate value of landscape to the economy through tourism	Ongoing/Aspiration	AP, LAs	This case is made wherever possible, but would benefit from better data and evidence, and a more structured approach.

EC- People Enjoying and Caring About the Landscape

EC1	Implement new 3 year Young Rangers project incorporating the John Muir Award	New action	AP and partners	Project funding application submitted Oct 2019 and successful. Project starting late autumn 2020, first activities in early 2021.
EC2	Actively engage partners to develop the role and influence of the Destination Partnership , especially to oversee implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy	Ongoing	AP, SHT and partners	The Destination Partnership continues to function, with varied attendance, but proven need in relation to Covid-19 recovery. Active engagement of Shropshire Hills partners with redevelopment of a Shropshire DMO.

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	Progress at October 2020
EC3	Promote less well known locations in the AONB in order to disperse visitors , spreading both the load and benefits	Ongoing	SHT and partners	Walking and 50 hills pages of AONB website have been popular in 2020, along with Shropshire's Great Outdoors website with many options for walks and activities. Dispersal especially relevant in post-lockdown situation, with honeypot sites under acute pressure, but many less known locations have very limited infrastructure.
EC4	Publicise the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and use it as tool for engagement, including possible Charter Part II with businesses	Ongoing	AP, SHT and partners	The Charter and sustainable tourism principles have been highlighted in work with the Councils, DMOs and businesses. Some interest from businesses in Charter Part II scheme but not progressed so far.
EC5	Continue to operate Shropshire Hills Shuttles , seeking new funding and refining service	Ongoing	AP, SC, NT	Successful 2019 season but funding becoming more challenging. A reduced service was planned for 2020 but this was suspended due to Covid-19 restrictions, with a Park & Ride service in Church Stretton being operated instead. Future funding now even more uncertain.
EC6	Establish a new sustainable tourism business network for the Shropshire Hills	New action	AP, SHT	Some discussions with partners.
EC7	Support visitor centres – Cardingmill Valley, Discovery Centre, Bog Centre, Acton Scott, Much Wenlock, Bishop's Castle Town Hall	Ongoing	SHT, AP, LAs	Run by a variety of organisations including community groups. Many centres are now multi-functional, as visitor centres alone may be no longer viable. Still an important resource despite increase in use of online information.
EC8	Maintain rights of way and promoted walking routes to a good standard, especially prime routes such as Offa's Dyke Path and the Shropshire Way	Ongoing	LAs	Council management of rights of way and promoted routes is carried out as well as possible with resources available, but funding is a serious limitation, especially for capital projects (e.g. bridges and major repairs, flood damage etc)
EC9	Support places within the AONB to develop and promote their walking offer	Ongoing	LAs, AP	The main towns in and around the AONB have worked hard on their walking offer. Routes, promotion etc need to be kept up to date and renewed.
EC10	Continue volunteering support for Parish Paths groups and Volunteer Rangers	Ongoing	LAs	P3 groups continue to be active and supported. Potential for a better network of volunteer rangers if adequate professional support could be given.
EC11	Improve provision and promotion for cycling of different kinds and levels	Ongoing	LAs, AP and partners	A range of opportunities are publicised by different organisations. Also a high degree of user-generated on-line routes. Would benefit from a structured review and gap filling exercise. Significant potential for capital investment into more off-road cycle routes, but considerable background feasibility work is needed.
EC12	Pursue ' Caering for Caradoc ' fund-raising appeal and explore possibilities to replicate this, perhaps at the Wrekin	In progress	AP & Trust	'Fix the Fort' appeal operated through 2019 and over £2,500 raised. First tranche of practical work able to go ahead subject to Covid-19 restrictions.

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	Progress at October 2020
EC13	Repeat five yearly visitor survey	New action	AP, SHT	Local visitor survey carried out in Church Stretton in summer 2020.
EC14	Continue to link Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre with AONB landscape and as an orientation centre for visitors to the area	Ongoing	GCL	The Discovery Centre has progressed well under the management of the social enterprise 'Grow Cook Learn'. Closure due to Covid-19 restrictions in 2020 poses major challenges.
EC15	Promote the area's best qualities to the business community and encourage an 'ambassador' approach	New action	AP, SHT	No specific action so far.
EC16	Expand membership of Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB	Ongoing	AP & Trust	Recruitment efforts have drawn new members and increased income considerably, though overall net numbers have only increased slightly. Suspension of public events in 2020 has slowed momentum.
EC17	Develop and promote a varied programme of events and optimise relevance to the AONB	Ongoing	All	A wide variety of countryside events are provided by many organisations, and publicised on the AONB website and elsewhere. Covid-19 restrictions during 2020 have halted almost all of these.
EC18	Develop the annual leaflet swap event into a sustainable tourism conference	New action	SHT, AP	Successful Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Expo held April 2019. 2020 planned event cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Shropshire Hills Tourism is undergoing change in committee personnel, with some reduction in activity.
EC19	Seek to develop conservation holidays involving practical volunteering	Aspiration	NT, SWT?	Some discussions with partners.
EC20	Improve roadside signage marking AONB at entry points	New action	AP, LAs	No action so far.
EC21	Foster links with the Shrewsbury University Centre and other HE and FE institutions	New action	AP	Some connections formed. Would benefit from further structured activity.
EC22	Improve links with Duke of Edinburgh Award and other outdoor activity providers to raise awareness of the AONB	New action	AP and partners	Attendance at regional DofE conference. Potential for further contact with provider groups.
EC23	Demonstrate value of landscape to health and wellbeing	Aspiration	AP, LAs	This case is made wherever possible, but would benefit from better data and evidence, and a more structured approach.
EC24	Develop an interpretation plan for the AONB	Aspiration	AP & partners	No action so far.
new	Adopt and implement recommendations from the Glover Review, and encourage implementation of actions led by others, e.g. government, local authorities.	New action	AP & partners	Report to Defra in June 2020 on actions so far.

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	Progress at October 2020
-----	--------	------	-----------------	--------------------------

Organisations listed in Actions tables

AP	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	NRW	Natural Resources Wales
CLA	Country Land & Business Association	NT	National Trust
EA	Environment Agency	SC	Shropshire Council
FC	Forestry Commission	SGS	Shropshire Geological Society
FCL	Foundation for Common Land	SHT	Shropshire Hills Tourism
GCL	Grow Cook Learn	SRT	Severn Rivers Trust
HE	Historic England	SWT	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
LAs	Local Authorities	Trust	Shropshire Hills AONB Trust
NE	Natural England	WT	Woodland Trust
NFU	National Farmers Union		